

Many happy returns as classrooms reopen

Castleton *Students and faculty are glad to be back after being relocated since a Jan. 7 asbestos accident*

By MIKE FRICANO
Staff writer

Balloons, streamers and clowns greeted 370 students as they returned to Castleton Elementary School on Monday, 19 days after a work crew discovered asbestos at the school, prompting its closure.

The school's bulletin boards were empty and blackboards in some of the classrooms were without erasers. But after attending classes at makeshift sites throughout the community, no one was complaining about a few missing supplies.

"I feel like a 5-year-old on Christmas morning," said Castleton Elementary School Principal Darlene Adams.

On Jan. 7, a construction crew sawed through window frames, inadvertently releasing the carcinogenic fibers throughout the third-grade wing of the school, which was built in the 1920s.

The accident forced the relocation of students to other facilities. For the past two weeks, some students had

attended classes at the district's middle school and high school while others used extra space at a nearby church.

In addition, many of the school's supplies and some books also had to be disposed of for fear they had been contaminated. Schodack School Superintendent Doug Hamlin said the district spent \$350,000 on the clean-up. Fortunately, said Hamlin, the school was able to save almost all of the books.

Parents also helped out by painting rooms, and construction crews installed new floors and ceilings while crews from Questar III removed the asbestos.

Adams said Monday's special morning program was a celebration. The roughly hour-long assembly featured a puppet show and the presentation of a \$2,500 check from Capital District Physicians Health Plan to help get the school up and running.

Students and teachers on Monday took inventory of what materials were lost and needed to be replaced.

"It's good to be back. Everything is very clean and new," said third-grade teacher Eileen Van Oort, who has been teaching for the last two weeks at the nearby Emmanuel Reformed Church.

Even the students were excited



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PRINCIPAL DARLENE ADAMS leads the morning program Monday at Castleton Elementary, reopened after a Jan. 7 asbestos leak.

about returning.

"It feels pretty good," said 9-year-old Vanessa Cooke, "because we're back and have the whole school together."

Fellow third-grader Jackie Burl, 8, echoed Cooke's sentiments. "It was big and different, but now we get to see all of our friends in other grades. I

missed my classroom, and I'm looking forward to a real lunch."

The entrees for the day were hot dogs or meatball subs with milk.

Adams was not sure what the lunch was while emceeding the program, but joked: "I don't know what lunch is, but I know that it's not a bag lunch."